

Foster Youth to Independence Vouchers in California: The Role of Advocates

1. What is the Foster Youth to Independence Housing Voucher Program?

The Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) Program provides a type of housing choice voucher for young people who are leaving or have left foster care. These vouchers were developed to improve housing security for youth aging out of foster care. FYI was designed by young people who were in foster care and experienced homelessness after aging out. These vouchers can be requested by Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) when they collaborate with local child welfare agencies of probation departments. The PHA will provide the voucher and the child welfare agency provides or arranges for support services for the young person. These support services are voluntary. FYI vouchers last for three years, but can be extended for two additional years if the young adult is participating in the [Family Self Sufficiency Program](#) (FSS) or similar programs. These are programs that support employment, education, and incentivize saving.

2. Who is eligible for an FYI voucher?

Eligible youth (including probation supervised foster youth) meet the following criteria.

- Are 18 through 24 years of age (have not reached their 25th birthday), and
- Have left foster care, or will leave foster care within 90 days, and
- Are homeless or are at risk of becoming homeless when they were age 16 or older.

Eligible youth include probation supervised foster youth who meet the above criteria.

3. How does the FYI program benefit young people?

Stable housing is crucial for young people to successfully transition to adulthood. Without stable housing, young adults face significant challenges to meet their education and employment goals. But young people aging out of foster care face many barriers to securing safe and affordable housing, including their age and lack of family support, which many young adults rely on for their first apartment. The FYI program can be a critical stepping stone for young adults as they move from foster care into the adult world.

4. What is the role of advocates in helping young adults secure stable housing by accessing FYI vouchers?

Advocates can play a critical role in helping young people access FYI vouchers by taking the following actions:

- If the young person is still in foster care, ask the child welfare agency to refer the youth to the local Public Housing Authority for an FYI or FUP voucher as part of the transition planning process. It is recommended that you request that the child welfare agency make a referral as early in the transition planning process as possible. While the PHA can request an FYI voucher as early as 90 days before a youth leaves care, the youth's case planning team can be preparing the case months in advance of 90 days before discharge and begin activities like: gathering vital documents, preparing the information needed for the Housing Choice Voucher application, and searching for a unit.
- Assist young people who have already aged out make a request that the child welfare agency refer them to the PHA for an FYI voucher.

5. What should an advocate do if their county is not accessing FYI vouchers?

If the child welfare agency has not yet connected with local PHAs so that they can distribute FYI housing vouchers or you are confronting other barriers with your advocacy, you can connect with the CA FYI Advocacy Group to help you make these connections. Please email Madeleine Wykstra at mwykstra@ylc.org.

Advocates should be aware that some PHAs may not be familiar with the FYI/FUP programs and will benefit from you sharing information with them about the program.

Advocates should also be prepared to coordinate with the relevant child welfare agency.

For more information on FYI, see [here](#).